

# Promoting good sexual health within Scouting

Advice for adults in Scouting



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## Introduction

Organisations such as Scouting play a key role in helping young people both develop the confidence and self-esteem to resist peer pressure to be sexually active until they are ready, and to make safe and informed decisions. However, many young people are already sexually active and adults in Scouting can play a significant role in promoting safe and responsible relationships.

Whilst parents or schools are still likely to be young people's preferred sources of information and advice, adults in Scouting have a trusted role in the lives of young people and this makes them a potential source of confidential information and advice. This document aims to:

- clarify the role of adults in Scouting with regard to information about sexual health and young people.
- provide guidance, support and information to adults who may be approached by young people.

## Overview

There are many reasons for The Scout Association to adopt a proactive stance in promoting good sexual health. The United Kingdom has the highest teenage birth rate in Western Europe – three times higher than France and five times higher than the Netherlands. Around three-quarters of teenage births are unplanned. In addition to high conception rates, at least 10% of sexually active teenagers are estimated to have sexually transmitted infections.

The sexual health and behaviour of teenagers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is evidenced by many of the surveys undertaken. The average age for commencing sexual activity in the UK is 16 and one third of 16-19 year olds claim to have had sex before the age of 16. Approximately 50% of teenagers say they do not use contraception.

The latest findings from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) 2007, state that risky sexual behaviour is influenced by a number of factors; low self esteem; lack of social skills; lack of knowledge about the risks of different sexual behaviours; availability of resources; and the individual's attitudes towards the subject.

There is often confusion over the legal issues regarding sex and relationships. The following statement (taken from The Department of Education and Skills – *Enabling young people to access contraceptive and sexual health advice – 2005*) has been written to explain the Sexual Offences Act to Young People. It has been developed by young people and agreed by the Home Office (please see following page):

## The Scout Association

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**Sexual Offences Act (2003):**

*In England and Wales, the Law on Sexual Offences has been updated. Under this law the legal age for young people to consent to have sex is still 16, whether you are straight, gay or bi-sexual.*

*The aim of the law is to protect the safety and rights of young people and to make it easier to prosecute people who pressure or force others into having sex they don't want.*

*Forcing someone to have sex is a crime.*

*Although the age of consent remains at 16, it is not intended that the law should be used to prosecute mutually agreed teenage sexual activity between two young people of a similar age, unless it involves abuse or exploitation.*

*Under the Sexual Offences Act you still have the right to confidential advice on contraception, condoms, pregnancy and abortion, even if you are under 16.*

*But remember, whatever your age, you shouldn't have sex until you feel ready.*

**The Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008**

*In Northern Ireland, the law on Sexual offences has been updated. Under this law the legal age for Young People to consent to have sex has now changed from 17 to 16 to fall in line with the rest of the UK.*

*This law came into force on the 2 February 2009.*

*The age of consent has changed from 17 to 16. This means that if you are 16 and say yes to sex, the law will accept that you gave your consent.*

*The change to the age of consent does not mean that the law is now saying that sex at an earlier age is fine. But, if you are 16, it is your responsibility to make sensible decisions about sex.*

**In Scotland, the law on sexual offences has been updated and is referred to in the Sexual Offences Scotland Act 2009.**

*The Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act came into force on 1 December 2010.*

*The Act reforms the current law on sexual offences and creates a range of new statutory offences. It criminalises a range of sexual conduct, which takes place without consent. The Act defines consent as "free agreement", which may be withdrawn at any time.*

*The Bill maintains the age of consent at 16.*

*Part Five of the Act provides for offences concerning sexual abuse of trust. The Act provides that it shall be an offence for a person in a position of trust over a child under the age of 18.*

Specific laws protect children under 13, who cannot legally give their consent to **ANY** form of sexual activity.

### **Advice for Leaders: Beaver Scout and Cub Scout Sections**

Whilst it is unlikely that Leaders within these Sections will need to take positive action to deal with sexual health issues, it is important that they consider the needs of any Young Leaders working with them. Adults in this position should consult the guidance for Explorer Scout Leaders.

Leaders should also be aware of the 'Behaviour of Adults within Scouting working with young people' section of this document, found on page 5.

### **Advice for Leaders: Scout Section**

Leaders in the Scout Section will need to consider what activities and advice should be included in their programme to ensure young people have the knowledge to make safe and informed decisions. Young people in the Scout Section may not wish to seek advice from their parents and, although

sex and relationship education is provided at school (the statutory curriculum varies between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland), they may still be looking for information.

It is important that Leaders consider any Young Leaders operating in their Section. Leaders in this position should consult the guidance for Explorer Scout Leaders.

Leaders should also be aware of the 'Behaviour of Adults within Scouting working with young people' section of this document, found on page 5.

Here are some examples of information and advice that a Leader in the Scout Section may provide:

- If you are asked where a young person should go to access local sexual health services, you should direct them to the provision provided by your local authority. Often this is coordinated by the Teenage Pregnancy Coordinator. There may also be facilities offered by Brook or other agencies and Young People's One Stop Shops (contact details at [www.scouts.org.uk/shis](http://www.scouts.org.uk/shis) ).

- If you are asked about contraceptive methods or other sexual health matters, you should try to provide relevant information. This information could include the details of local contraceptive services and the location of local sexual health clinics. If asked, you should try to provide details of local emergency contraception provision, which you can obtain from the local Teenage Pregnancy Coordinator.

- If you are asked about pregnancy testing, you should refer the young person to local health professionals, such as their GP. You should highlight the benefits of involving the young person's parents or carers.

- If you suspect that a young person is being coerced, abused or exploited you should advise them that you have to pass this information on. You **must** take this action, even in circumstances where the young person is reluctant to co-operate with this course of action or specifically asks you not to. You should follow the procedures laid down in the Young People First Code of Behaviour (Yellow Card), details can be found at [www.scouts.org.uk/safeguarding](http://www.scouts.org.uk/safeguarding)

Many of the situations that Scout Leaders may come across can be found in the FAQ section of this factsheet. You can also find information on a number of websites, including [www.fpa.org.uk](http://www.fpa.org.uk) and [www.brook.org.uk](http://www.brook.org.uk).

### **Advice for Leaders: Explorer Scout Section**

Leaders in the Explorer Scout Section should consider how their programme can support young people in making good safe and informed decisions regarding their sexual health. They should also consider what advice and information should be provided to Explorer Scouts.

Leaders should also be aware of the 'Behaviour of Adults within Scouting working with young people' section of this document, found on page 5.

Explorer Scout Leaders involved in the support of Young Leaders should be mindful of the needs of these young people to access this information and support.

The programme of the Explorer Scout Section gives young people the opportunity to discuss issues with their peer group that may not be so easily discussed elsewhere. Suggested programme ideas can be found on [www.scouts.org.uk/pol](http://www.scouts.org.uk/pol) and in the My Body, My Choice resource pack ([www.scouts.org.uk/shis](http://www.scouts.org.uk/shis)).

Explorer Scout Leaders should be prepared to offer appropriate information to their Explorer Scouts.

The Explorer Scout Section provides an opportunity to convey a clear message to resist peer pressure to have early sex, it also gives a forum in which to promote good sexual health.

There are a wide variety of situations that may occur as an Explorer Scout Leader. Here are some examples that may assist Leaders in making decisions:

- If you are asked by an Explorer Scout about local contraceptive and sexual health services, you should try to provide them with details of where and how to access these services. Your local Teenage Pregnancy Coordinator will be able to supply you with details of local services.
- Because of the nature of a Leader's relationship with their Explorer Scouts, it is possible that personal issues will be discussed. If asked, you should encourage young people to resist pressure to have early sex.
- Leaders are encouraged to have leaflets with information about local contraceptive services (including telephone numbers, location details and opening hours) alongside those that may be kept regarding drugs or bullying. If you are asked, you could stress the confidential nature of these services.
- It may be possible to arrange a Unit visit to, or by, a local contraceptive and sexual health clinic. This will help to break illusions of what these services are and improve the uptake of advice. Any Leader planning such a visit should inform the Explorer Scouts' parents or carers of this plan – however, there is no need to seek their written permission.

- Leaders should not provide advice on the suitability of particular contraceptive methods, as this is the responsibility of health professionals. However, Leaders can provide general information about contraceptives and sexual health using leaflets provided by their local statutory services or other organisations such as FPA or Brook.

- In responding to enquiries from young people, Leaders should be prepared to find the details of local emergency contraception provision and agencies that offer advice and support. More information and links to agencies can be found at [www.scouts.org.uk/shis](http://www.scouts.org.uk/shis).

- If you are asked about pregnancy testing, you should refer the young person to local health professionals, such as their GP. You should also highlight the benefits of involving the young person's parents or carers.

- If you suspect that a young person is being coerced, abused or exploited you should advise them that you have to pass this information on. You **must** take this action, even in circumstances where the young person is reluctant to co-operate with this course of action or specifically asks you not to. You should follow the procedures laid down on the Young People First Code of Conduct (Yellow Card).

There are other questions covered within the FAQ section of this document.

The information in this factsheet does not affect the arrangements that Explorer Scout Leaders should put in place for residential events. The sleeping arrangements at Explorer Scout events should place males and females in separate sleeping accommodation. Further information can be found at [www.scouts.org.uk/onemovement](http://www.scouts.org.uk/onemovement).

#### **Advice for Leaders: Scout Network Section**

Due to the age of the Scout Network there are no legal issues surrounding the giving of advice or contraception. However, the advice given for Explorer Scout Leaders (please see above) may be of interest to you and would be relevant if dealing with members under 18.

The provision of programmes relating to sexual health may be of use to Scout Network Members, these can be found on Programmes Online [www.scouts.org.uk/pol](http://www.scouts.org.uk/pol) or by contacting an external agency who can offer assistance [www.scouts.org.uk/shis](http://www.scouts.org.uk/shis).

### **Scout and Explorer Scout residential events without adults present**

Where an event has no adults present, advice should be given to participants before the event to ensure that the sleeping arrangements are in accordance with the Association's guidance and that everyone is aware of the arrangements.

The Association's guidelines state that separate accommodation should be provided for male and female members. Variations to these guidelines can only be made in exceptional circumstances.

### **Religious and cultural issues**

As adults in Scouting, it is important that, regardless of our own faith and values, we offer appropriate guidance to young people. Personal interpretations of faith range from the liberal to the strictly traditional. Every religion has its own teachings regarding relationships and contraception and it is important to respect the right of young people to make the choices that they feel are right for them. All young people are entitled to information and advice to allow them to make informed choices.

Young people's religious, cultural and personal views will need to be considered before providing specific advice to the individual, remembering some young people will view abstinence as a positive decision and others will want advice and guidance. ✓

Whilst some Scout Groups are sponsored by religious bodies this should not be a barrier to providing appropriate advice, information and guidance to young people in line with Scout Association policies. ✓

Adults looking for guidance designed for young people from specific communities should access the information provided by the Teenage Pregnancy Unit

[www.dcsf.gov.uk/teenagepregnancy](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/teenagepregnancy).

### **The Fraser Guidelines**

The Fraser guidelines (named after Lord Fraser) provide a guide to good practice.

An adult in Scouting may give advice without the parents' knowledge and consent - *if necessary* - in the following circumstances:

- The young person must be able to understand the advice being given.
- The adult cannot persuade the young person to inform his or her parents that he or she is seeking contraceptive advice.
- The adult should only provide contraception if they believe the young person is very likely to begin or continue having intercourse with or without contraception.
- Unless the young person receives contraceptive advice or treatment, their physical or mental health are likely to suffer.

For a full set of the guidelines go to FPA factsheet Under 16s: consent and confidentiality in sexual health services March 2009.

[www.fpa.org.uk/professionals/factsheets](http://www.fpa.org.uk/professionals/factsheets)

Remember that any discussions you have with young people should be in accordance with the Young People First Code of Behaviour on the Yellow Card, especially:

Do plan activities that involve more than one other person being present, or at least are in the sight and hearing others

Do respect a young person's right to personal privacy

Do remember this code of behaviour even at sensitive moments e.g. when responding to bullying, bereavement or abuse

### **Behaviour of adults in Scouting working with young people**

The bond between adults in Scouting and the young people in their care can be strong and positive. It is important that this position of trust is not abused.

Leaders of activities (including residential experiences) should ensure no adult is able to abuse their position of trust. Where the leadership team for an event also involves Young Leaders, they should be afforded the same protection as members of the Section itself.

## Frequently Asked Questions

*What is the Law and what are the facts and figures regarding sexual health?*

The key points can be found in the overview section of this factsheet. For more details, including specific legal differences in Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands, please refer to the relevant country's headquarters or factsheets available from [FPA](#) or [Brook](#).

*Do I have to provide this advice to members of my Section?*

No, but you should ensure that information is available to young people in your Section if it is requested.

*Do I need to act differently with young people from different religions?*

It is important to respect everyone's religion and cultural beliefs, but all young people are entitled to appropriate advice and information. Please refer to the Religious and Cultural Issues section of this factsheet.

*Why are we providing advice on sexual health matters – is it not obtained at school?*

All schools must provide sex and relationships education and make their policy available to parents. However, many young people will want to talk to someone who is not their teacher or parent. Sometimes an adult in Scouting will be the easiest person to approach.

*Should a Leader be providing advice and information on sexual health?*

If a young person tells you that they are already sexually active or are likely to become so, they

can be provided with information about contraception and good sexual health.

*What do I do if the press ask me about our policy?*

The Scout Association's guidelines follow best practice laid out by expert organisations. Any enquiries by the press should be referred to the Media Team at Gilwell Park on 0845 300 1818.

*When do these guidelines come into effect?*

Leaders should adopt these guidelines immediately.

*I have a single sex Troop (or Unit), does this still affect me?*

Yes. Even if your Section is single sex young people may still want access to information or advice.

*Does going abroad mean we should do anything differently?*

No, but it may mean you need to do some preparation in the UK before your visit - having regard for the laws and culture of the country being visited and also considering the guidelines of The Scout Association.

*Do I have to take a supply of condoms with me?*

No. It is *only* acceptable to have condoms / femedoms available to young people in line with the Fraser guidelines (see page 5).

*As an adult, where can I go for help and advice about sexual health matters?*

There are many organisations that provide more information that adults may find useful. These include your local statutory agencies and other organisations such as the FPA and Brook. They all have websites with factsheets and other useful information, for a list of agencies please visit [www.scouts.org.uk/shis](http://www.scouts.org.uk/shis)

*What if I'm not happy about giving advice?*

Adults, particularly those working with young people of Explorer Scout age, should be prepared to give information to young people who seek it. If you are uncomfortable about discussing these

issues, refer the young person to another adult or to your local sexual health services. You might like to have information or leaflets to hand should a young person ask.

*Doesn't some of this guidance contradict the child protection training?*

The Child Protection Policy requires that Scouting protects young people from physical, sexual and emotional harm. This guidance is consistent with our role in ensuring that young people can make informed decisions about their own well-being. You should follow the guidance on the Yellow Card at all times.

*I have Young Leaders in my Section – who has to deal with them?*

As the Leader of a Section their well-being is your responsibility during the time they spend with your Section. If you have Young Leaders working in your Section you should read the advice for the Explorer Scout Section. Additional support and advice may be available from the District Explorer Scout Leader (Young Leaders).

*Where can I get programme resources to help deal with sexual health issues?*

Programmes Online continues to have quality programme ideas added on a regular basis. A number of programmes to assist adults in addressing sexual health matters are available here. There is also programme support available from other organisations via [www.scouts.org.uk/shis](http://www.scouts.org.uk/shis) including the My Body, My Choice resource pack.

*Should I follow different guidance in a sponsored Group?*

Whilst there are different sensitivities within a sponsored Group, young people should still have access to advice and information. Please refer to the religious and cultural issues section of this factsheet.

*I'm running an event with members of Girlguiding UK or other organisations – what guidelines should I follow?*

The guidelines in this factsheet should be followed when undertaking events with other organisations, including GGUK.

*Should contraception be made available at our local Scout campsite?*

No. Contraception can *only* be accessible to young people in accordance with the Fraser Guidelines.

*What do I do if I discover...*

Whatever you discover/uncover – you follow the guidelines set out in the Yellow Card.

*What records do I have to keep of advice I provide?*

You do not need to keep records unless it falls within the Yellow Card guidelines.

*Can I give young people access to contraception without advice being offered as well?*

No. Contraception can *only* be accessible to young people in accordance with the Fraser guidelines.

*Is it OK for an adult member to have a sexual relationship with a member under 18?*

Adults should avoid unacceptable situations within a relationship of trust e.g. a sexual relationship with a youth member over the age of consent. Any relationship between a youth member (even if they are over 16) and an adult in Scouting should be reported in accordance with the guidance on the Yellow Card.

### **Further Support**

There are many organisations that can provide support for adults. A list of websites can be found at [www.scouts.org.uk/shis](http://www.scouts.org.uk/shis). For support with programme ideas to promote good sexual health within your Section please visit [Programmes Online](#) and search by Life Issues, or alternatively download the My Body, My Choice resource pack from [www.scouts.org.uk/shis](http://www.scouts.org.uk/shis).